

XVI.
15.

ADDRESS
TO
THE STUDENTS
OF
THE SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGE,
JANUARY 5TH, 1846,
BY HON. WM. C. PRESTON.

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE STUDENTS.]

COLUMBIA, S. C.
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1846

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CORRESPONDENCE.

TO THE HON. WM. C. PRESTON.

SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGE, }
January 7, 1846. }

At a meeting of the Students in the College Chapel this evening, the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

“Resolved, That a Committee be appointed to request of our Hon. President, a copy of his eloquent and appropriate Inaugural for publication.”

Believing that your Address will be read by the public, with as much interest as was manifested during its delivery; and under the sure conviction that an address, abounding as it does, with so many able and instructive precepts, should not only be perused by every Student of College, but treasured up as a lasting memorial of the relation in which we stand to our President, we earnestly solicit your compliance with the above.

Very respectfully, yours,

R. H. REID,
JNO. RATCHFORD,
WM. LOGUE,
F. W. McMASTER,
F. GAMEWELL. } *Committee.*

SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGE, }
January 8, 1846. }

Gentlemen:—I do not hesitate to comply with the request of the Students, which you have just communicated to me. Although their kindness places an estimate on the Address which my own judgment does not sanction, I am not the less grateful for it.

I beg you, gentlemen, to accept my thanks for the flattering terms in which you have discharged your office, and am,

Very respectfully,

Your obt. serv't.,

WM. C. PRESTON.

To Messrs. REID,
RATCHFORD,
LOGUE,
McMASTER,
GAMEWELL, } *Committee.*

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ADDRESS.

Young Gentlemen of the College :—

Entering upon the office to which the Trustees have appointed me, I have thought it not inappropriate to present myself to you, in a somewhat formal way, and to make a few remarks which the occasion seems to justify.

The intimate relations which are hereafter to subsist between us, involving very grave responsibilities on my part, and the deepest interests of life on yours, will be the more readily and efficiently established by an exposition of my understanding of our most prominent, respective duties, and of the feelings and purposes with which I now assume mine.

It has been the pleasure of the Trustees to call me from walks of life very remote from those I now enter upon. For many years, I have been busy amidst the active pursuits of men, taking some part in affairs where the conflict of interest, the collision of intellect, and the tumult of strenuous and stormy passions left but little leisure for those calm and meditative employments which are the occupation within these walls.

After thirty years absence from them, I return, but in a new and trying condition, with sympathies in all your pursuits, to be sure, and tastes not entirely alienated from science and literature, but with a deep and fearful anxiety, that I may, indeed must be, unqualified to discharge the trust as it ought to be. Under a conscious deficiency, I would have shrunk from this office, but that I yielded my own opinion to that of those for whose judgment, experience, and knowledge of the Institution, I have an entire deference. Of that Board of Trustees, whose command I obey, I can safely affirm, that having in the chances of life, been occasionally thrown with men,

distinguished by the consent of the whole country, I have not found anywhere, even in those exalted stations to which a nation's interests call its most conspicuous citizens, a wiser, graver, or more highly endowed body.

To its discretion and intelligence, the destinies of this cherished Institution are well confided, and I hold myself ready to conform to its wishes with the same implicit confidence, whenever it may think fit to remit me to the pursuits of private life, as now, that I relinquish those pursuits in compliance with them.

I have the more willingly acquiesced in their judgment, as it has been in favor of one who had differed with the State, on some important and exciting questions. To be made its trusted agent under such circumstances, to be put without solicitation, in this place of confidence and honour, in which the interests, the hopes, and the affections of the State are so deeply implicated, fills me with gratitude, and oppresses me with a painful sense of responsibility. In the swell of strong emotions which fill my heart, all vanity is quenched in the consciousness of inadequacy to make a suitable return.

What I bring, gentlemen, to my station, and what I trust may in some sort make amends for my deficiencies, in other respects is, a deep and reverential love for this my *Alma Mater*,—a solemn sense of my duties, and I may be permitted to say, a love of letters, not altogether extinguished by contact with the world. Nor am I insensible in adopting this course of life, to the pleasing satisfaction (as Cicero says,) of seeing myself surrounded by a circle of ingenuous youths, and conciliating by laudable means their esteem and affection. There certainly cannot be a more important or honorable occupation than to instruct the rising generation in the duties to which they may hereafter be called,*—and I hope I may, without the imputation of arrogance, be allowed to adopt another sentiment of that illustrious Roman:—

“Ac fuit quidem quam mihi quoque initium acquiescendi,

* De Senectute.

atque animum ad utriusque nostrum præclara studia referendi, fore justum et prope ab omnibus concessum arbitrare—si infinitus forensium rerum labor, et ambitionis occupatio, decursu honorem, etiam ætatis flexu, constitisset.”*

In the pleasing task to which I now address myself, it will be my constant effort to promote your studies, and to prepare you for the duties of life, (more important than life itself,) with such stores of learning as may be acquired here, but more especially with ardent and virtuous aspirations to acquit yourselves with honor hereafter.

The immediate and ostensible object of our association is the pursuit of learning, and this might seem to be our sole purpose; but in truth, learning is only a means to the great end we have in view. It is an instrument which is prepared and fashioned here, with some instruction as to the mode of using it. It is but the armour, but a part of the armour to be worn in the battle field of life for the atchievement of honorable and glorious victories, for the triumph of truth over error, of virtue over vice, of right over wrong. And although I cherish the conviction that there is a natural and intimate connection between knowledge and virtue, yet I know that they are not inseparable. There have been melancholy instances of great intellectual powers, united to acquisitions from the whole circle of learning, without a corresponding moral elevation. These however, I regard as anomalies; I rejoice to believe that in the general order of Providence, whatever enlarges and exalts the intellect, promotes, purifies, and invigorates the virtues of the heart. If I did not believe in such a connexion, I would abandon myself to indolence and despair. But the noble and distinctive faculties of man, whose combination constitutes his dignity and glory, are harmonized by his Creator into a concerted action

* I have always soothed myself with the hope that there would come a time of quiet and repose, when I might return to the noble studies that occupy us here. I have fondly looked forward to the day, when having finished my career of active life, I might have the right to enjoy a lettered repose, freed from the toils of the bar and the painful pursuits of politics.—*De Oratore*.

for a common purpose. Whatever enlightens the mind improves the heart, as the sun which illuminates the atmosphere warms the earth, and although it may happen that his beams are reflected from fields of ice, yet his general mission is to call forth whatever is useful and beautiful, and impregnate with vitality the whole body of nature. True knowledge is the knowledge of truth; as it is said in the fine arts, that nothing is beautiful but the true, so, in the wide signification of the word, it may be said that nothing is good but the true. To confer upon learning its just dignity and importance, it must be considered as subsidiary and auxiliary to the paramount ends of our being. It must always have in view our responsibilities in this life, and the awful responsibilities of a far more exceeding weight hereafter. You are to be made intellectual men, that you may be fit moral agents; so that as you advance in learning, you may advance in the knowledge and appreciation of virtue, remembering always that the lamp which you light up is not a gaudy show, to please by its variegated radiance, but is intended for a more useful and noble purpose, to show you, amidst the double night of error and of passion which obscures your journey through life, the only ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. Undoubtedly learning of itself is graceful and ornamental, and knowledge is power, but learning and knowledge attain their true beauty and full power only when united to virtue, and this union is ennobled, and, so to speak, sanctified by piety,—making the highest condition of our nature.—Learning,—morality,—religion,—these are your great objects. These, in the right understanding of them, include all that is desirable. They comprehend those lesser morals, the aggregate of which make a gentleman fitted to adorn and delight society,—they comprehend all those sentiments which become a citizen born to a participation in the government of the commonwealth, and all those deep convictions and lofty aspirations which belong to heirs of eternity. This is my conception of the object and purposes for which we are associated. If we can persuade you to entertain a corresponding

idea of your duties, our task will be an easy one. We shall be joint laborers in the same field, cheered by the sure prospect of a luxuriant harvest. This, our seed time, will be a season of hope and joy, while we look forward with eager and confident anticipation to the glories of a rich harvest, and still farther to the garnering of it where there is no rust, and thieves cannot break through nor steal.

But besides the ulterior and paramount value of the moral sentiments to which I have alluded, they are of immediate and vital consequence to us here. The good order and successful administration of the College, depend entirely upon their influences.

You have passed the period of coercion, and already are moral agents. In all communities laws avail but little without a prevailing sentiment to sustain and carry them out in their true spirit. "*Quid valeant leges sine moribus,*" is true every where, but most emphatically true here; our government resolves itself almost entirely into an appeal to the sense of honor and duty, without which our laws are nugatory, and their impotent penalties carry no sanction. The fear of the law which prompts to a cold and reluctant observance of it, may secure from punishment, but as a principle of action, must always fail of any honorable success, and the government whose efficiency depends solely upon it, must fail in its main objects.

You cannot, young gentlemen,—you ought not to be governed by mere dint of law,—you must feel that there are other and higher rules than it imposes,—indeed other and higher laws than are to be found in our statutes,—laws in your own bosoms, written on your hearts,—the penalty for disobedience to which, is the consciousness of wrong,—and the reward of obedience, the consciousness of right.

It may, and perhaps must be necessary, wherever human nature is to be governed, to invoke the interposition of the law,—but our habitual and by far most pleasant, and as we hope, most efficient appeal, will be to your honor and sense of right.

We do not indulge the chimerical expectation that a moral

discipline can be so far enforced as to supercede an occasional application of penal laws. Our observation of life permits no such hope, for in no association whatever,—not senates or councils, can be regulated by the mere discretion of the members,—much less can it be expected from the thoughtlessness and passions of the young. Acts of discipline must occur, and when the occasion requires them, they will be firmly and promptly applied,—but what we do calculate on, is the prevalence of a pervading sentiment, that will render such a necessity infrequent,—a sentiment which will inspire more fear of offence than of punishment.

The impulsiveness and impatience belonging to your time of life, naturally make the degree of exertion and industry requisite to your proper advancement, irksome and painful to you. Indolence presents herself to the young,—aye! and to the old,—in a thousand seducing forms. Industry is of a harsh and crabbed aspect. The one seems to point to a smooth and flowery path,—the other to a rugged and painful ascent,—but around that seducing path lurk all the ills of life,—and that toilsome ascent, at every step opens wider and wider a broad and beautiful prospect, and leads eventually to those elevations to which the noble spirit aspires.

Industry is the prolific mother of many virtues. She produces as well as sustains them,—they all cluster around and nestle about her, growing and strengthening by her care. Genius itself, that divine quality which seems to be instinct with innate power, and to rise by its own upward tendency,—genius itself, is plumed for its highest flights, and trained to them by industry. It is an utter mistake to imagine that any endowment can dispense with labour. It is a fatal error into which young men fall,—no great achievement ever has or ever can be effected without it,—the mode of its application may be obscure, but its presence is not the less certain. We have heard of the forest-born Demosthenes,—“of nature’s darling,”—

“Fancy’s child,
Warbling his native wood notes wild,”—

“of the blind old man of Scio’s rocky isle.” These were men of genius, unquestionably,—but Henry, and Shakspeare, and Homer, were also men of labor,—they had the blessing of inspiration, but the blessing came to them after they had wrestled all night.

Our intercourse, I trust, will be characterized by the courtesy becoming gentlemen. My government I hope will be animated by the vigilance and tempered by the affection of a parent. If I see you preparing yourselves to go home to delight a father’s heart, my bosom will swell with a parent’s pride, and my vanity will be gratified if your proficiency authorizes me to believe that when the State shall hereafter point to its jewels, I may say I helped to fashion them.

I trust also, gentlemen, that both our official and social relations, may be such, that when you go into the world, and ascertain by experience the value of the lessons taught here, you will remember the College with affection, and me with no indifferent feelings, and meet me, when the chances of life throw us together, not without emotion.

Young gentlemen, if I were better qualified than I am for this office, I know how vain my efforts must be, even with the assistance of my able colleagues and your zealous cooperation, without the gracious protection and help of our Heavenly Father. To Him, then, and to His beneficent providence, I humbly and earnestly commend the issue of this undertaking.

